

No 34

An Inaugural Dissertation
On
The Use of Cathartics.

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On Cathartics.

Cathartics are defined those substances, which quicken and increase the evacuation from the Intestines by stool.

Medicines of this class have been employed ever since the first dawn of Phisic; and have been administered, with different views and intentions, according to the prevailing theories of the times, or the favorite doctrines of individuals. Thus the judicial astrologers made them as particular times of the moon, and according to the junction and opposition of the planet. The Humoral pathologists gave Cathartics with the intention of expelling, present matter, which had been separated from the mass of fluids by the process of fermentation. But these theories are now almost entirely expelled from practice. Modern practitioners have two objects in view in the exhibition of Purgative medicines; the one is to empty the bowels of their contents, which are in a manner, extraneous to the body, and completely out of the circulation; the other is to cause a greater secretion of fluids into the cavity of the intestines. These substances have thus been divided into two classes, those which produce the former effects are denominated Laxatives or Securgatives, and the latter Purgatives; the more active of which are called Stomachic Purgatives.

The action of a Cathartic on the alimentary canal may be considered as threefold. In the first place, it stimulates the mucous surface of the intestines, and increases their natural peristaltic action, by which their present contents are more quickly discharged. Secondly,

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It stimulates their exhalant vessels, and causes them to pour out a more copious secretion of fluids, and also the excretory ducts of the mucous glands, by which means, the stools are rendered not only quicker, but thinner and more abundant. Thirdly, the stools are much more copious by an additional quantity of fluids, secreted by the liver, Pancreas &c. and fourthly, the bowels become in general more abundant, hence the increased action of the absorbents and the advantages derived from of this class in certain diseases. Whether bathing acts in this way in the cure of those diseases is still a matter of doubt. The opinion is supported by the most respectable authorities, that they act by diminishing the quantity of circulating fluids and thus promoting absorption.

From this consideration of the effects of cathartics on the system, their utility in some diseases, and their injurious tendency in others, as well as the necessity of varying their degree of activity will be readily understood. Taking into consideration the length of the intestines, as well as the number of vessels, and the ducts of the mucous follicles and the large ducts from the liver, Pancreas opening on their surface, it will be obvious that Purgatives, by opening all these outlets, must occasion a very great general excretion and consequent diminution of the fluids of the body. Hence in acute inflammatory diseases, in which retention of the blood vessels is to be avoided, this excretion is an excellent expedient, and forms a principal part of the Antiphlogistic plan.

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of the trunk. It also seems that by pressing another inappreciable advantage is obtained viz a change in the distribution of the fluids; thus if an evacuation be made from one set of vessels the afflux of fluids to these will be increased, and consequently the quantity distributed to other parts of the system will be diminished. Upon this principle we are enabled to explain in some measure the beneficial effects derived from purgatives in the diseases of the head, dependent on increased action, and their injurious tendency in inflammation of the bowels.

When the contents of the intestines are markedly retained from whatever cause, the administration of cathartics is inevitable. If constipation is attended with a flaccid habit, or much flatulence, and irregular distention of the abdomen, some of the warmer cathartics should be given. But if there is a deficiency of bile, a milder purge is most proper. In those cases where costiveness is accompanied with more acute symptoms as violent pain in bowels, or with pain, tenderness and bloody or stringy stools as in Dysentery, or with pain and rectal pain as in inflammation of the bowels, cathartics though necessary must be varied in their nature and mode of administration. For instance in Colic, they should not be used, until the spasmodic constriction has been overcome by opiate, or the torpid state of the blood vessels is diminished by venesection. In Dysentery they should

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be attended with benefits, otherwise the irritation they produce will counterbalance the good effects of the vaccination. In countries the vaccination will tend to increase the inflammation and constitution if they be employed before bloodletting and other remedies have reduced the inflammation.

Collocations are also indicated, by worms generated in the instances.

Cathartics, either purgative or laxative, figure an useful in several other affections, partly by exciting the intestines to contraction, and partly by converting their character to the neighbouring viscera of the abdomen, as in Jaundice and suppression of the menses.

Another important indication, which Cathartics are capable of fulfilling, is, increasing the action of the absorbents. Whether this is done by diminishing or by exciting action, or by exerting a stimulant effect, these reports themselves are worthy of credit. It appears, in some measures, to be owing to each of these, and thus we explain the manner, in which Cathartics are useful in effusions of fluids into the different cavities of the body. In Gastritis it is much better to administer these remedies, by way of injection, as they will not irritate the already inflamed stomach, so much, as they would by direct application. —

Having taken this view of the operation of Cathartics, we shall now proceed to consider more fully their application or remedies to the cure of disease, and those which naturally present themselves first are the Stages of Dysentia, and the first of these are the Pains.

Feb. 18.

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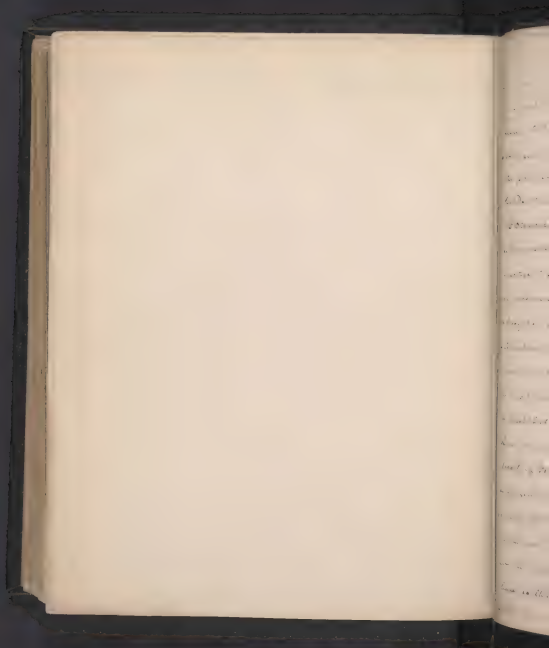


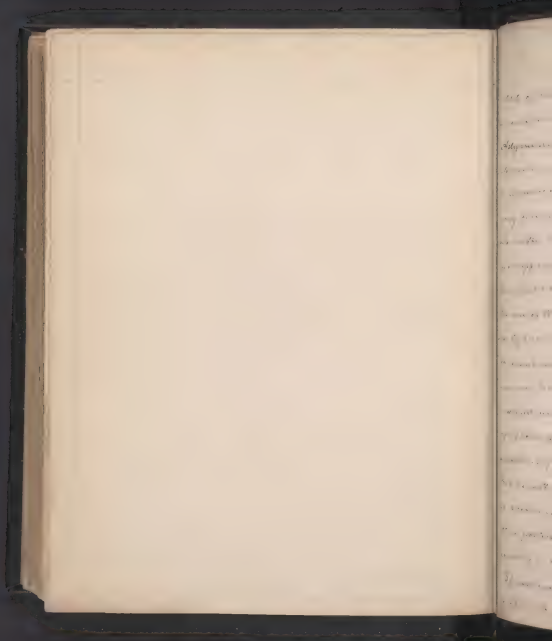
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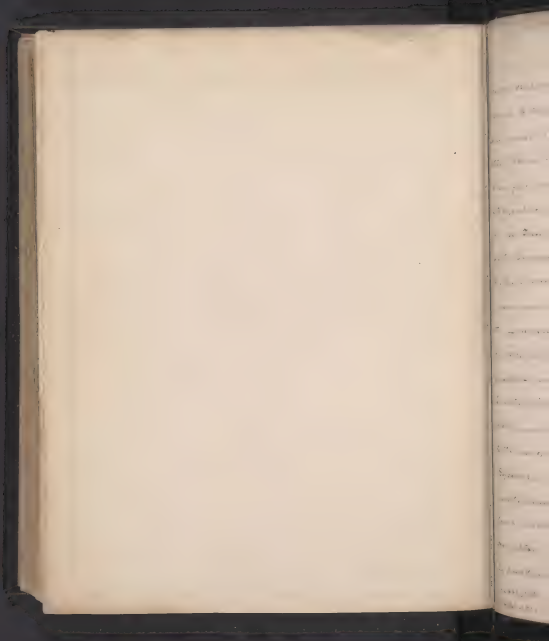
Holyspermia *Dyspeptica* seems to arise from a disease of the
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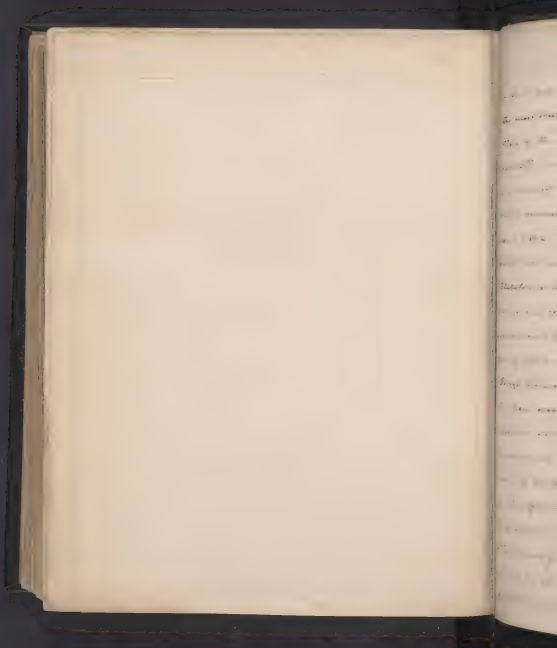
Small quantities of the secretions of the liver are found in the
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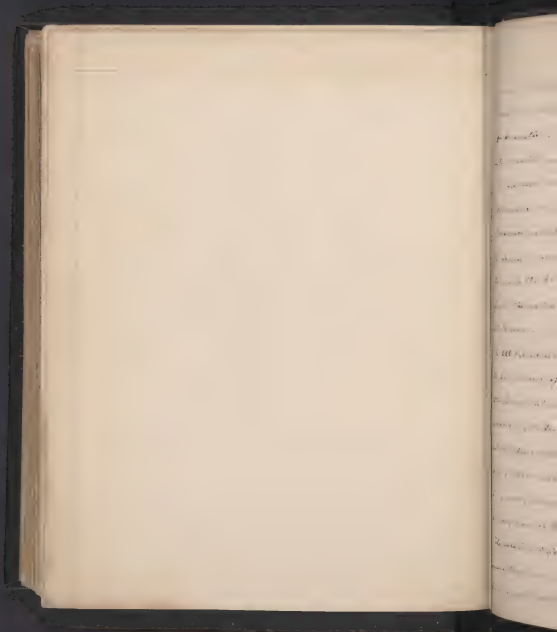
Dyspeptica is a disease of the liver, and is very common in the case of
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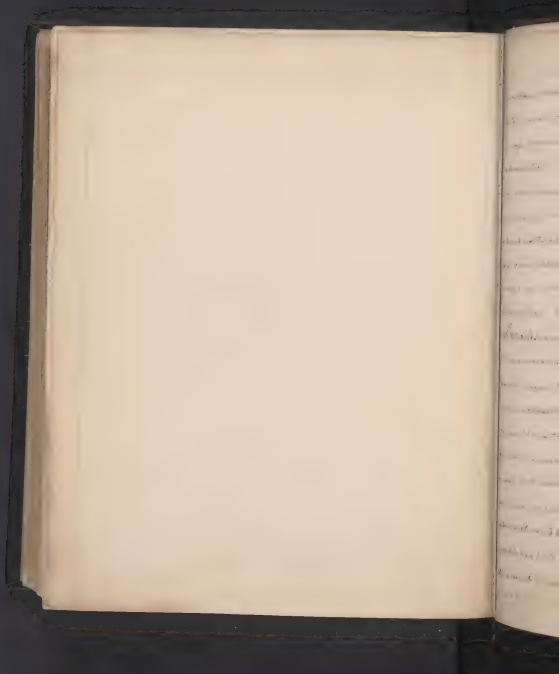
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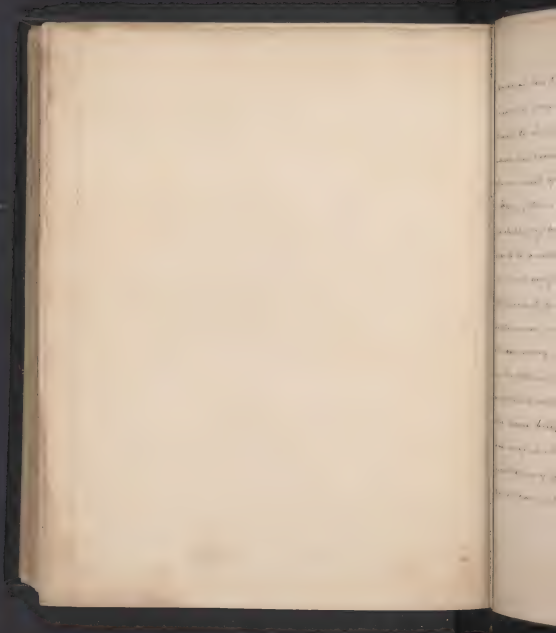


The most drastic criticism has rather the aspect of an over-zealous
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for so as to be able to determine the general character of the
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 should be considered in the progress of the house as a whole, for
 some of the parts are so connected with the whole, that they
 are not to be separated from it, but are to be considered as
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From the comparison of the whole with the parts, the general character
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